

Paris in war time - the time of the Great War - the first world war - as we have learned to call it - for since then there has been another: the disastrous consequences of which we are all familiar. To cast our minds back to 1914 we should try to visualise the social and political conditions of the France of those days -

It was some forty odd years since the Franco Prussian war of the Eighteen Seventies, the Germans were still in possession of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine & the older folk still had grim tales to tell of the Siege of Paris and the plight of its starving citizens -

The younger people, having no such bitter memories, had as usual adapted to the existing conditions & indeed Paris had recovered her position as the cultural centre of Europe, the Eiffel Tower had been built, reaching towards the sky, a powerful symbol of the intellectual & physical strength of France. Neither had the reputation of Paris as the 'Ville Lumière' the centre of gaiety & fashion lapsed, indeed the frequent visits of Edward the Seventh were legendary, culminating as they did in the 'Entente Cordiale', a mutual defence against the continuing threats posed by the ambitious schemes of

the Kaiser -

But in spite of the present prosperity and activity in the arts & sciences, the loss of the two provinces continued to ramble. After all, Lorraine was the home of Joan of Arc and so much of French history was linked with the border areas, it would not well be forgotten. At the four corners of the Place de la Concorde in the centre of Paris had been placed statues symbolising the principal towns. That of Strasbourg had been covered with mourning wreaths in 1971 & ~~continually~~ ~~replaced~~ until a happier day in 1918 when they were torn down and replaced ~~with~~ ^{by} the tricolors.

And now it had all happened again. The famous 'scrap of paper', ~~the~~ guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium had been torn up and the invading German armies had only been checked by the heroism and determination of the allied forces at the battle of the Marne.

But large areas of the homeland ~~was~~ ^{were} including ^{the} coal mines had been ~~overrun~~ ^{overrun} and the long terror of five years of trench warfare - an unknown quantity so to speak, for both sides, had begun.

For those whose relatives & belongings were in the occupied areas life was a continual nightmare of uncertainty and all this was happening at a comparatively

Short distance from the Capital -
 My brother who was a cadet at
 Sandhurst when war broke out was
 immediately gazetted to the 7th Gloucesters
 & my father who had retired from
 the Indian Army in 1910 was
 'dug out' as the saying was & given
 a command in Rouen - My mother
 & I in due course returned to the
 flat in Paris. This was on the 2nd floor,
 overlooking the Champ de Mars
 & close to the Eiffel Tower - an
 ideal position in peace time, not
 so funny when the lifts ceased to
 function through lack of power and
 the central heating reduced to a
 minimum for the same reason - We
 cooked by gas but there again the
 pressure was so low, it took ages
 to boil a kettle - However, it was
 the same for everyone & I imagine the
 conditions in which we lived were
 pretty typical - There was no question
 of any paid help & my mother's state
 of ^{health} ~~help~~ was very poor - I was about
 sixteen, my school had ceased to
 function and there was no possibility
 of any further education -
 There were many shortages & most
 necessities were rationed - One vital
 exception - ~~the~~ the produce of
 Normandy was still available - eggs,
 butter, milk - I think without them

life would have been extremely difficult. All these things were accepted as normal and belief in ultimate victory never doubted. The hard winter of 1916 added very considerably to our discomfort. The Seine was partially frozen & the barges that normally brought fuel & other necessities to the capital were stranded. I can remember burning such things as one could spare in order to produce a little warmth.

It is curious how quickly habits once dropped get forgotten. Few now remember the obligation to wear black or to be 'in mourning' after a bereavement. This was especially ^{so} ~~obligatory~~ ^{important} in France. The sight of so many women draped in black crepe was tragic evidence of the growing casualty lists. 'Courtauld's crepe' made in England, by now a valuable export. The Eiffel Tower, now the main radio station was heavily guarded and defended by 'Seventy fives' on the platforms. It was also the main target for the increasingly frequent air raids. We were not told of any damage or casualties incurred. I imagine they must have been considerable, what we now term 'the media' was in no way the force it is to-day. I can remember the very first ^{night} ~~or~~ when a Zeppelin flew over the city to everyone's intense curiosity.

+ Excitement. We had been ordered by the police to take shelter in the cellars of the apartment block. When someone called out that the airship was over the house, with one accord we all rushed out to see it. No damage of any kind was recorded.

As the war went on + the casualties increased one could sense a feeling of utter determination developing: 'They shall not pass!' This was especially true of the grim days of the battle for Verdun with its appalling slaughter. These, indeed, were the great days of the history of France before the disillusionment that followed the peace ended in surrender. So many pictures are evoked as one casts one's mind back to the early days. The heroic figure of the 'Forku', the Unshaven (the French equivalent of Thomas Atkins, or 'Old Bill', and his unbeatable cheerfulness. The French lady who had seen a British contingent march by: 'One could see they had been free men for generations' was her remark. The old grey stone walls of the ancient fortifications - the preparations for hand to hand fighting at the gates - should it be necessary at la Defense de la Cite, the Kaiser's Cavalry, his Uhlans had after all got as far as Chantilly.

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the later change to far more sophisticated weaponry - The same spirit of defiance that refused to be impressed by Big Bertha who delivered her shells on the city from an unbelievable distance. The noble figure of Marshal Foch and his simple, Christian way of life - the bringing of the Unknown Soldier to rest in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe - One early morning when all else was quiet the distant thunder of the guns on the Somme - -

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